1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942

FF52 Nupe ~~FF52~~

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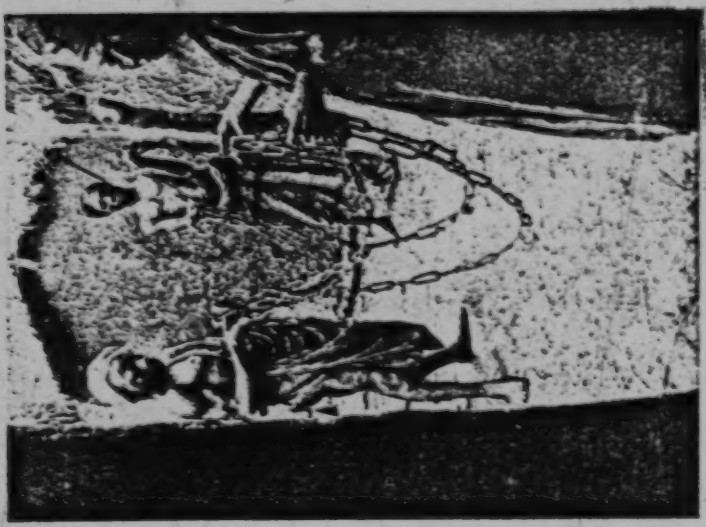

THE *CHAIN OF TSOEDA*

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THE SACRED BRONZE FIGURES ON JEBBA ISLAND

[FACING p. 72]

1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942
FF52 Nupe FF52

The Nupe brass-smiths also practise soldering with tin, and one or

two have specialized in repairs of watches, sewing-machines, and such-like. They also practise a crude technique of *cire-perdue* casting. This technique is applied in the making of a kind of signet-ring, very popular both among men and women, and, by one expert, in the making of small brass figures of animals, which have become quite famous in Nigeria. These figures are traded by many of the itinerant Hausa traders and are bought by Europeans who take them for products of an interesting indigenous art. I cannot prove with certainty that these little figures—*sasagiši*, as the Nupe call them, 'likenesses of man'—have never had a deeper significance. But I am inclined to think that they have not. They have no place in Nupe culture as it presents itself to us, either as religious symbols or as symbols of wealth (in which form similar figures are used, for example, in Dahomey). I know, moreover, that in the case of the one expert who produces these figures to-day in Bida it was his own enterprising spirit that made him adopt and develop this (for a time at least very profitable) 'tourist industry'. To examine the cultural channels through which the suggestion of this production, the artistic *motif*, has reached Bida, is not part of my present task. I have, however, been able to trace two objects produced by this expert brass-worker to their original source. It is a case of what ethnographers call 'culture borrowing', and is sufficiently interesting to be quoted here. This brass-worker had for some time been producing 'dancing figures', little human figures which, by a clever utilization of stable equilibrium, were made to revolve and 'dance' on a small brass stand without falling off. He got the idea for these figures from a travelling Indian trader, who had shown him pictures of the model and explained the principle to him. He had paid the Indian 2*s.* for the 'lesson' and then proceeded to manufacture similar figures himself. The same brass-worker also produced the figure of a cobra of typically Indian design, which he had copied from a figure he had seen in the house of a European.

The raw material used by the Bida brass-smiths is all imported. The Nupe, it appears, never mined copper, nor knew how to produce the alloy. In pre-European days, I was informed, brass and copper were brought up the Niger from Onitsa and Lagos. To-day copper is obtained from English pennies, and brass from rifle cartridges which Hausa traders buy up in the garrison towns of Nigeria and then sell to the brass-smiths of Bida and other towns. Silver is gained by smelting down silver coins which the brass-smiths procure from a Kaduna bank.

A few examples may illustrate the relation between cost of material and the profit made on the finished article. Brass ladles, an article for which there is great demand in Hausa country, are sold for 3*d.* apiece; for one ladle the brass from twelve cartridge-cases is used, costing 1½*d.*; the brass-smiths can produce two ladles a day, thus making a daily profit of 3*d.* Silver bangles are sold for 12*s.* a pair; the cost of the material is 10*s.*, and the working time from two to three days, allowing a daily profit of 9*d.* to 1*s.* Aluminium bangles, which are made to cater for the cheaper tastes, are sold in large quantities to traders and middlemen; half a dozen, which can be produced in one day, are sold for 2*s.*; the material (bought in sheets at the European store) costs 1*s.* 6*d.*, and the profit per

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954

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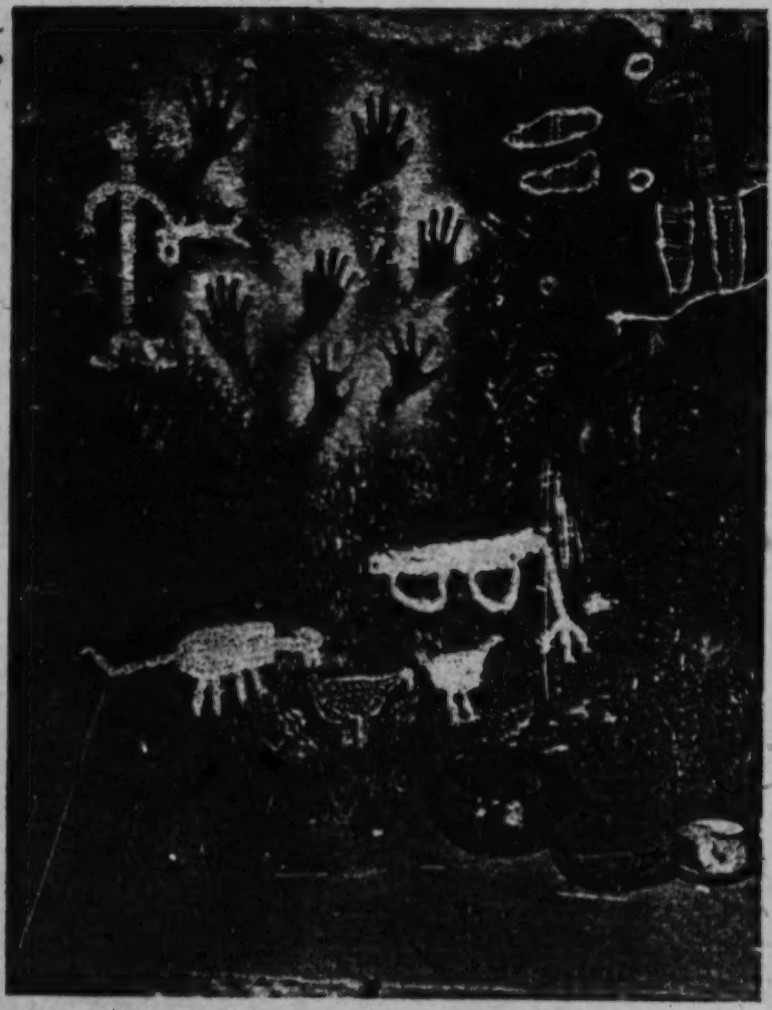

3. Wall paintings in a Nupe house

[p. 22(B)]

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

sacrifice to a *cigbe* shrine of that name, said to ward off smallpox; the other, the *mamma* proper, consists mainly in the appearance and dance of masked figures called *nāgbe*. The masks themselves are referred to as *kūyí* ('full garment') or simply as *ewo* ('dress'), and their appearance is meant to cleanse the village of evil influences. These are not further specified save negatively, in that they exclude witchcraft. The *zumácikā* is said to have been introduced by an old woman who, many years ago, happened to arrive in Jebba during a smallpox epidemic and taught the people the secret of the appropriate medicine; nothing further is known about her, about the manner of her death, or about her burial place. The medicine is contained (so it is said) in an earthen pot which now stands under a low grass roof in the middle of the village. It is in every respect an unusual version of *cigbe*. It cannot be utilized at will but only at this ceremonial; it belongs to the village and not to any individual owner; nor yet is it used in the manner of other medicines. For the substance in question is neither drunk nor otherwise applied to the body, since its effect would be deadly if it were so used; indeed no one has ever seen it. It is hidden inside the vessel, being periodically increased when blood and beer from the sacrifice are added, and its mere presence is magically effective. This effect bears on the prevention of the disease rather than its cure: smallpox is being 'kept away as you keep away a stranger'; which preventive aspect is also reflected in the date of the ritual, which falls towards the end of the cold season, while outbreaks of smallpox are believed to occur only during the hot season, in the 10th and 11th month.

The masks of the *kuti mamma*, on the other hand, are attributed, with so many other things, to Tsoede. They are made of dried grass, consisting of a skirt and a kind of veil covering face and chest, and during the year are stored in the houses of various elders. While the *cigbe* vessel stands on a public place and is in no way concealed, the masks must be kept hidden and may be put on only in a safe and secret place. The whole ritual is similarly veiled in secrecy; it takes place at night, the women having been warned to keep indoors, and out of the sight of strangers: if women or strangers were to see this *kuti*, they would be killed by its 'force'.[1]

The ceremonial I saw started about 8 p.m. on a moonless night,

[1] The fear of the *mamma* is a very real one. At the time of the performance here described the District Head from Mokwa, a Fulani nobleman, happened to stay in Jebba. He heard that a 'feast' was going to take place, and when he learned that I was going he decided to come also. He arrived when the dance was already in progress, gave one look, and literally fled. His hurried retreat was received with much hilarity by the men present, who added: 'This is how all strangers run away when they hear the *mamma*.'

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
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(a correct statement of the fact that the secret society is called in by the *gunnu* priest), or 'the Great *gunnu* is the *Gboyá*'.

The full name of the cult means 'Grandfather' or 'Ancestor *Gboyá*'; the latter word is neither a personal name nor a word that has any other meaning, though it contains the recognizable root *gbo* 'to be large' (in a physical sense). The expression 'Grandfather' in this connection has no ancestral connotation but merely indicates a show of respect. The masked apparitions also command a special address or salute, namely, *nyentso sagba*, 'One who puts to flight'. The name *ndakó gboyá* is employed for the ritual performance as such, for the masks appearing in it, and for the 'spirit' the masks are thought to represent; the cult members are simply referred to as *ndakó gboyázi*, 'the *Ndakó gboyá*-ones', and their organization is called the 'society' of *ndakó gboyá*.

The masks of the *ndakó gboyá* are unlike any other masks used in the cults of Nigerian peoples. They bear no similarity to human or animal features; each mask consists of a long tube made of white cotton cloth, just wide enough for a man to stand inside, which is suspended from a wheel-shaped bamboo frame fixed to the top of a tall pole, about twelve feet in length. The man representing the spirit stands inside the cloth tube which comes down to the ground, holding the pole in his hands. He will move about with varying speed, occasionally jumping and running, and lift and lower the pole or incline it this way or that, making the cloth tube swing and sway: which motions make up the 'dance' of the *ndakó gboyá*. There are two small slits at eye-height in the cloth; but the dancer can see little through them, and depends on the help of assistants (two or four in number and known as the 'servants' or 'interpreters' of the *ndakó gboyá*), who lead him along and clear the way for him, carrying sticks to drive back the onlookers. In large ceremonials up to ten masks may be employed, though normally there will be two or three, or even one only.

It is always a strictly kept secret who is inside the mask. Even when you know every member of a local *ndakó gboyá* society (as I did) and therefore know that one of them must be the dancer in the mask, the people will refuse to answer such questions. Nor will they agree to an informal rehearsal merely to show you the technique of the thing; for to step inside the mask is already a magic or mystic action, which requires the appropriate setting and preparations. The performer must first drink and wash himself with the *cigbe* which alone gives him the 'strength' to represent the *ndakó gboyá* and, before this, must sacrifice beer and fowl over the *cigbe* shrine and the cloth masks. Nor does the profane phrase 'to represent the *ndakó gboyá*', do justice to the situation. To begin with, the 'medicine' used by the performer is the *badúfu* kind

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

771 177 effigies and cult objects.[1] It is unlikely, incidentally, that these figures are Yoruba in origin; but they are of the same kind as the effigies of deities worshipped by the Yoruba. Now, the Nupe do not regard their figures as representations of deities; indeed the whole question, what or whom they represent, evokes no great interest. For the Nupe, the figures are merely 'likenesses' of a man and a woman (who is sometimes called the man's mother) and, more importantly, relics of Tsoede. Their possession is understood to be exceptional and indeed unique; and even though they figure prominently in one of the Jebba rituals, they do not add anything relevant to the purely religious conceptions. The images are simply the unusual objects of an unusual, 'royal' cult, but not more magically effective or possessed of special meaning because they happen to be shaped in human likeness.

The second exception is more important. In Mokwa and one or two villages in the river valley, we meet with a masked dance called *elo* (a meaningless word in Nupe), which is quite unlike any Nupe dance or ritual.[2] It does, however, somewhat resemble the Yoruba *gugu*, which equally occurs in Mokwa, not only in its paraphernalia but also in certain gestures and motions of the dancers. [532] The *elo* dancers wear long-sleeved hoods of coloured cloth cut like those worn in the *gugu* and cover their faces with coloured wooden masks, carved in grotesquely human features and surmounted by horns. The masks resemble those of the *gugu* only in that both are meant to represent a human face; but in the *gugu* the design is produced by cowrie shells sewn on to the cloth, while the *elo* type is reminiscent rather of the masks used by the southernmost sections of the Yoruba, or by the Ibo and other tribes in Southern Nigeria. The people who perform the *elo* know little about the origin of the masks or, indeed, of the whole ceremonial. It is said that Tsoede brought it from the south and established it in certain villages of his small river kingdom 'because he liked the dance so much that he wanted to see it again and again'. The masks now used are the work of the wood-carvers of Shonga (a mixed Yoruba-Nupe village on the Niger), though this particular skill has since disappeared; one or two masks are quite recent, having been made by a craftsman at Rabah who has preserved the old art. The hoods of cloth, on the other hand, are an innovation; in the youth of one

[1] As has been mentioned, similar figures, though both smaller and cruder, are found in Tada, another riverain village. What is said here about the Jebba figures equally applies to the Tada 'idols'.

[2] I recorded the *elo* in Mokwa, in Rabah (a few miles away on the river) and in Gbajibo, north of Jebba. In addition, smaller villages and hamlets in the neighbourhood, which do not themselves possess the *elo* masks, perform the dance annually with masks borrowed from Mokwa.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
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28. Mask of the 'Great *elo*'

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29. Dancer at the Bida *salla* with headdress modelled on the *elo* mask

[p. 230 (A)]

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

with which indigenous sacred knowledge was never concerned are now tacitly assumed to be within the ken of mallams. Whenever you ask the 'man in the street' about the origin of the world, about the sun, moon, and stars, or about the rules of the calendar, he will refer you to the mallams—'these are things the mallams know'. More often than not, this trust is sadly misplaced. But as the Nupe lack of interest in mythology admits of one exception, namely, myths or legends about the genesis of Nupe kingdom, so the growth of the Moslem Emirate has become the theme of numerous stories and quasi-mythical traditions.[1] To be sure, they are not Moslem traditions in the strict sense of the word; but they are traditions about the crucial events of Islam as seen through Nupe eyes. In this sense they add to the religious supports which the Fulani Emirate has come to command, much as the pagan kingdom drew some of its strength from the cycle of myths devoted to Tsoede and his miraculous deeds. And in this sense, too, they may be said to 'fill lacunae', that is, to replace a mythology outdated by events.

Among the other features of the Moslem 'way of life' several fit remarkably (and fortuitously) into the pattern of Nupe culture. This is true, for example, of the attitude to representative art, which is absent in Nupe and discouraged by Islam; of certain general rules of marriage, such as the payment of a 'brideprice', the ease of divorce, and the preference for marriage within the kindred;[2] of the custom of circumcision and one of the dietary rules of Islam, the prohibition of eating pig.[3] The ease with which Moslem kinship rites or the Islamic method of divination found a niche in Nupe life has already been discussed.

There are a few exceptions, however. The Nupe preference for *yawó dengi*, marriage within the kindred, refers only to cross-cousin marriage and excludes the marriage of parallel cousins, which Islamic practice permits and recommends; similarly the sororate, common in Moslem countries, is forbidden by traditional Nupe custom; conversely, the Nupe preferential marriage, between a young man and his mother's brother's widow, is unknown to

[1] Some of these have been quoted in *A Black Byzantium*, pp. 78–9.

[2] The Nupe 'brideprice'—*ewó yawó* ('money of marriage')—corresponds to the 'dower' (*Mahr* or *sadaq*) of Islamic law. The ready acceptance of their equivalence is seen in the linguistic usage, the Arabic word *sadeiki* having become almost a synonym for *ewó yawó*.

[3] Strictly speaking, traditional Nupe culture does not taboo the eating of pigs; but there exists a general idiosyncrasy of this kind, and the Nupe do not keep pigs (unlike their Yoruba neighbours). Another dietary rule of Islam, the prohibition of intoxicants, clashes with the great liking of the Nupe for sorghum beer and with the prominent part this drink plays in all sacrifices. The Nupe Moslem have, in fact, abandoned beer for palmwine, which many consider to be exempt from the Qoranic prohibition.

3: Forde E-4 (no date) 1955 FF52 Nupe FF52

the villages drumming is mainly a side-line to farming. Drummers in Bida form small bands or companies, the origins of which, and the type of their performance, vary. Both men and women perform and women sing. Members of a single group may come from different families. There are no *efakó* arrangements. Such a band may be in a *bara* (client) relationship to a nobleman. The various bands or companies do not co-operate. The drums are made by wood-workers on the river.[30]

Western crafts are practised for wages in the workshops of the N.A. Public Works Dept. These craftsmen include blacksmiths, mechanics, carpenters, and bricklayers. Temporary unskilled labour is employed mainly in occasional work demanding a large body of unskilled labour, such as construction work of various kinds. Most of these labourers go home and return to their permanent work at the end of their temporary employment. Those who are farmers seek temporary employment during the dry season only, to supplement the normal source of income.[31]

Women's crafts

Pottery is practised individually. Jebba Island, Baro, Badeggi, and Bida are famous for their pottery and there is a regular trade in both potters' clay and pots. The main products are small water jugs and large water containers. Clay is prepared from swamps at Gbako River, at Badeggi, and sold by the villagers. It is tempered with powdered potsherd or brick. The building of the pots is individual work, but firing is undertaken collectively. Pots are simply fired, then given a brown wash or blackened with a concoction of shea-nut bark.

Shea-butter manufacture is carried out by women, but the roasting ovens are built by men.

Indigo-dyeing is practised only by a few *Konni* groups, where the men are weavers and the women dyers. The indigo-grass and the indigo-tree are cultivated by men, but where the indigo is picked and prepared from wild growing grass, the work is done by women. The dye-pot platforms are made by women; the dyeing is carried out individually. There are a few groups of male dyers (e.g., in Mokwa), who use a rather different technique from that employed by the women.

Women's weaving is done on upright looms 21 ins. broad, which may be of Yoruba origin. Among the Basa-Nge, older women weave patterned raffia. Fishing-nets in Kede are made by old men and women from *rama* fibre.[32]

Weapons and tools include spears, bows and poisoned arrows used by the more remote groups, and knives with blades 8 to 10 ins. long. A few men use flint-locks, and formerly a whole section of the Nupe army was equipped with guns.

Dug-out canoes are used by the Bataci as well as the Kyedye. Those of the latter are large and square with caulked top strakes. They are mostly obtained from Onitsha and the lower Benue.

Musical instruments include a central-hole flute (the blow-hole is midway between the ends of the tube), pipes, clarinets (of Hausa origin), various drums and rattles, long bronze trumpets (forming part of the royal insignia), and, in some areas, bull-roarers and animal horns.

Gabi figures are statues of different origins. Two bronze figures stand unprotected in the centre of the village of Jebba Island near a dilapidated hut which is said to have been formerly a temple. There are seven figures at Tada village which are kept in a round hut and carefully tended; some of these are human figures and some animal and they appear to be of diverse origins, but are regarded traditionally as having been left by Tsoede on his flight up the Niger.[33]

[30] Nadel, op cit., pp. 301–3. For an outline of the *bara* system see below, p. 35.
[31] Nadel, op cit., pp. 304–8.
[32] Nadel, op cit., pp. 235, 293–7; Hopkins, 1934; Notes on Kede District, 1950.
[33] Temple, 1919, pp. 114, 117, 198, 322; Meek, 1925, vol. I. p. 108; Walker, 1934; see also Palmer, 1921.

8: Walker G-5 (ca. 1933) 1934 FF52 Nupe FF52

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BASE AS FIG. 4 IN "MAN," 1931, 201.

FIG. 4. (A). REAR VIEW.

FIG. 12. DARK BRONZE FIGURE OF ELEPHANT

BASE AS FIG. 6 IN "MAN," 1931, 201.

GABI FIGURES FROM JEBBA AND TADA, MIDDLE NIGER

Photographs by Mr. S. W. Walker.

[Facing page 169]

8: Walker G-5 (ca. 1933) 1934 FF52 Nupe FF52

MAN

A MONTHLY RECORD OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL SCIENCE

PUBLISHED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE
ROYAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSTITUTE OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

XXXIV, 190-200 NOVEMBER, 1934

ORIGINAL ARTICLES.

Nigeria. With Plate L. Walker.

Gbái Figures and Edegi, First King of the Nupé. *By S. W. Walker, District Officer, Ilorin Emirate, Nigeria.*

T18 539 193 [13]

In MAN, 1931, 261, Sir H. R. Palmer published an account of certain "representations of deities cast in metal . . . in the region round Jebba and Rába on the Middle Niger." I have recently had an opportunity of seeing these figures, and a fuller account of them may be of interest. For ease of reference the same numbers will be used as in Sir H. R. Palmer's article.

2. The two Jebba figures (Plate M 1, 2, 3) are well known and stand almost unprotected in the midst of the village on Jebba island, close by a dilapidated hut, alleged to be consecrated to their worship. The photographs accompanying the above-mentioned article are clear, and no further description is here necessary other than certain observations which a comparison with the other figures evokes.

3. The other photographs (Plate M 4, 5, 6, 7, 8) show four of seven figures at Tada, a small Nupé fishing village on the high bank of a backwater of the Niger, some 25 miles east of Jebba and some five north of Shonga. They are kept in a round hut and, unlike the Jebba figures, are carefully tended. They are taken out and scoured every Friday, and the floor is thickly spread with clean white river sand.

4. The most noticeable figure is one of dark bronze, 3 feet 8 inches high, bearing a general resemblance to the male figure at Jebba, both in technique, decorative treatment and conventional form. Its head dress consists of what appears to be a tight-fitting helmet, from which hang five coils reaching to the waist. To the front and rear of the helmet are attached medallions which bear the device illustrated in fig. 9, consisting of a horned and mustachioed face, surrounded by an interlacing design. Each medallion is surmounted by a crest behind which are models of birds as in fig. 10. The close-fitting gown reaches below the knees and is richly decorated with designs in low relief as in figs. 11 and 12. Round the neck hang a tasselled stole, a necklace and a chain bearing another medallion as in fig. 13. The design on the latter consists of a ramlike head surrounded by three birds which suggest the lesser hornbill.

5. Though the similarity of this figure to the male figure at Jebba is obvious, the differences are interesting. The quilted attire of the Jebba figure, with its dagger in front and quiver slung at the back, indicates a warrior in the act of drawing a bow, while the rich and perhaps magic ornamentation of the Tada figure may conceivably suggest a king, priest or civil official. The helmet of the former, like that of the latter, bears a medallion, but smaller, and decorated with the figure of a long-beaked bird similar to fig. 11. The top of the helmet is covered by what is now a tangled mass of bronze wire or 'shavings,' which, like the coils of the Tada figure, might be thought representations of hair, were it not for the fact that they appear attached to the cap or helmet.

6. Another of the dark bronze figures is of an elephant of somewhat slender body and long legs. It has a ridge along the back and is 2 feet high (Plate L, fig. 15).

7. The two remaining figures of dark bronze (Plate M 5) are of ostriches, 4 feet 4 inches and 3 feet 6 inches high respectively. Each has a curious plate on the back suggestive of a tortoise shell, only flatter.

8: Walker G-5 (ca. 1933) 1934 FF52 Nupe FF52

8. Then, there are two figures which in appearance seem to be cast out of pure copper. One is 1 foot 10 inches high, and represents a man standing with clasped hands. A small pigtail adorns the head, the eyes are very bulging, and the feet very big. The other (Plate M 6) is a remarkably realistic bit of modelling, and is as noticeable for this quality as No. 4 is for its formal decorative treatment.

9. There remains one small figure (Plate M 7, 8), 1 foot 4 inches high, apparently of pure brass. It is of a male figure of ungainly proportions and coarse features, holding a crook and wearing an apron. In addition, a small cotton cloth is tied round its loins.

10. No. 4 is very heavy, due probably to the fact that the clay core is still within the figure. The others are light and hollow. All are or have at one time been on shallow rectangular bases.

11. The first thing that strikes one about the figures as a whole is the difference in the material of which they are cast. All of them appear to be made by the *cire perdue* process. But, as has been indicated above, four are of dark bronze, two appear to be of pure copper, and one of brass. Only the three last-named are kept scoured. Another striking feature is the divergence of technique. It is impossible to think that there are less than three sources for these figures, not because of the difference in metal used but on account of the wide difference in treatment—unless, of course, they are copies of originals. However this may be, the designs on Plate M 2, 3, 4 are so distinctive and conventionalized that they must have had antecedents, and it is to be hoped that this article may have given sufficient data by which their origin can be traced.

12. The Village Head of Tada tells the following legend. The Chief of Atagara had a son called Shode who was a successful hunter but could not find a market for his meat. At that time the chief of a certain town called Wanta had a girl in his household whom he gave to Shode to cook the meat of the animals he killed. After a time she became with child by Shode. When he was about to return to his home, he brought her a charm and a loin cloth and told her to give them to her son when he was born, for a son it would be. Shortly after he had returned home, his father, the chief of Atagara, died and he succeeded to the chiefdom. Now, in those times when a new chief was installed, each town brought slaves, and it happened that this child Edegi, which the girl bore to Shode, was amongst them on this occasion. When the chief, Shode, saw Edegi, he recognized him by the charm and loin cloth, promoted him to honour and showed him much affection. Shortly before his death he called Edegi and told him that after his death he should gather all his property together and leave the country. At this the townspeople rose up in jealousy, but Edegi escaped and travelled up the Niger with his loaded canoes till he came to the neighbourhood of Bida. There he abandoned chains because of their weight and passed on to Tafa in Bida territory, then to Tada, Gbere and Jebba, at each of which places he left either chains or ornamental figures. He got as far as Kwatashi in Bussa, and then returned or was driven back. His boat and poles were of bronze. They lie in the Ega river close to Muregi. Edegi sank himself and the boat because he could not elude his enemies. He was the first chief of the Nupé.[1]

13. The information given in this account suggested further inquiry at Gbere, 15 miles east of Jebba, opposite Réba, the only one of the above-mentioned places that is situated in Ilorin Province. Owing to the phenomenal floods it was not possible to reach the village itself, but the chains were brought to Tada for inspection. There are five of them, measuring 33 feet 6 inches, 20 feet, 23 feet, 8 feet 8 inches and 7 feet 2 inches respectively, and all are much corroded. The links vary from 3 inches to 6 inches in length and are rectangular in shape. At the end of one chain is a circular link. The weight of all the chains is about 20 lbs.

14. The Ndeji and the Wangwa of Gbere say that the chains were used in pre-British days for strangling criminals. Executions were carried out in the bush by the Chechе assisted by three youths. The present Chechе who looks after the chains has not seen an execution, but the Ndeji

[1] *Note.*—According to the Busa legend, Edegi was chief of Gbere. He came up the river as far as Kwatashi, and encamped on the east bank of the Niger. Sarkin Wawa sent to warn him that he was not destined to become ruler of this region and if he stayed death would be his portion. It was then low water, and Edegi walked out to a large rock to receive the Wawa envoys.

When he heard their message he laid a curse upon the rock that any canoe that came near it would sink and any man that touched it would die. Edegi then departed down stream, but the rock remains and is still called Dutsin Edegi.

8; Walker G-5 (ca. 1933) 1934 FF52 Nupe FF52 .

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Fig. 9.

Fig. 10.

Fig. 11.

Fig. 12.

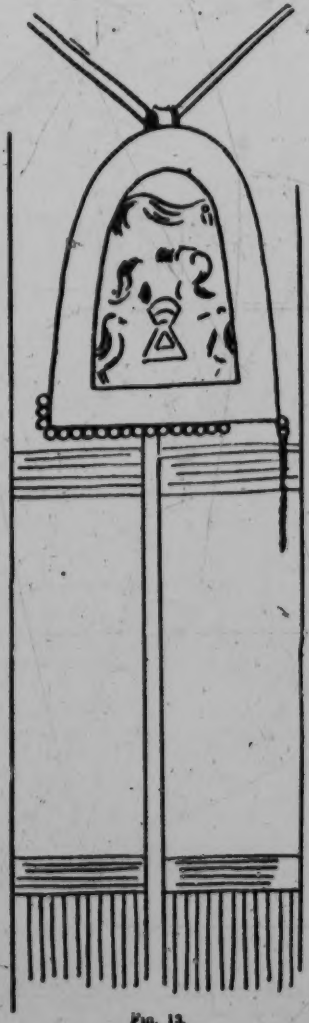

Fig. 13.

9:Nadel E-5 (1934-1935) 1935 FF52 Nupe FF52

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FIG. 1. LANDING-PLACE AT GBEBE, ONE OF THE LEDU VILLAGES.

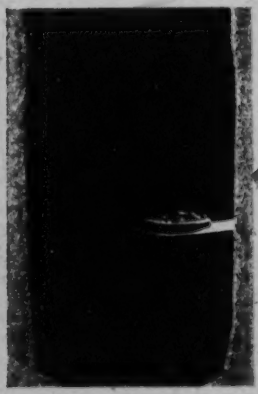

FIG. 2. THE "CHAIN OF THORNS."

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FIG. 3. THE SACRED BRONZE FIGURES AT JEBBA.

FIG. 4. VILLAGE CHIEF WITH [illegible] HORNS.

THE KING'S HANGMEN IN CENTRAL NIGERIA.

[Facing page 129]

9: Nadel E-5 (1934-1935) 1935 FF52 Nupe FF52

MAN

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XXXV, 143-160 SEPTEMBER, 1935

ORIGINAL ARTICLES.

Africa: West. With Plate I-J. Nadel.

The King's Hangmen: a judicial organization in Central Nigeria.

By Dr. S. F. Nadel.

Travelling on the Niger in Nupe country, between Jebba in the North and Eggã in the South, one comes across a certain group of villages, curiously distinguished from the rest of the riverain villages by the special name which the Nupe have for them: they call them *ledu*, in the plural *leduzhi*, which means, literally, 'prison.'

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The common name stands for a common organization to which they all belong. And as an apt symbol for an organization expressed by such a name each of these villages possesses the same emblem: a sacred iron chain (fig. 2). As a rule this chain is kept in the chief's house, and only very reluctantly would he show it as in fig. 4. At any rate, he would always make sure first that no woman (the anthropologist's wife included) is near the place when he brings it out into the daylight—for no woman is allowed to set eyes on this sacred implement. It is a heavy iron chain, often some 30 feet long, with strong leg- and arm-irons on it—what we should call a typical slave- or prison-chain. It is kept rolled up in a round wooden tray; but in one place, at Jebba, I found a railway wheel serving this purpose. The chain will always smell abominably, and will be covered with flies, the unmistakable sign that the traditional sacrifice of beer, and blood of fowl, has been performed properly.

There exist altogether eight such *ledu* villages. They are distributed along the Niger banks in a surprisingly regular manner, always between 10 to 15 miles apart from one another. The names of the *ledu* villages, from north to south, are as follows: Jebba, Gbere (fig. 1), Tada, Jiragi, Sûlati, Fofo, Tayi, Cewuru. Two *ledu* villages, Jebba and Tada—an offshoot of Jebba—possess, besides the chains, sacred bronze figures (fig. 3) which signify that these two villages are the 'old ones,' the heads of the *ledu* organization. The chain itself is called *égbã Tsoede*—the 'chain of Tsoede'—and chains and figures are said to have been brought to these places by the mythical ancestor of Nupe kingdom, Tsoede.[1]

The many versions of the Tsoede tradition which exist in Nupe country differ in details only. The main facts are always the same: Tsoede was a Nupe man, who was sent as slave to the Atta (king) of Idah, at the time when the Nupe were tributary to Idah. From a slave Tsoede soon became the Atta's favourite and friend. Presented by the Atta with slaves, wealth and powerful magic, but envied by the Atta's relatives, he had to flee from Idah after the Atta's death. In a magical bronze canoe, one of the Atta's presents, he paddled up the Niger and finally reached Nupe country. Here he settled down, and amongst the people of his country he distributed his wealth, the insignia of his rulership, and the emblems of his powerful magic. Very soon he delivered Nupe country from

[1] According to Nupe etymology the name Tsoede is derived from *Etsu Ede*, or *'tsu Edc*, *i.e.*, king Ede. This explains the other name by which the culture hero of the Nupe is also known, *Edegi*.